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ABSTRACT

Adult students enrolled in day and evening drawing classes can be introduced to two-dimensional composition through an exercise that combines the thumbnail sketch and the big-to-small principle. The exercise is composed of five steps and simple self-evaluation criteria that help students determine whether they understood and achieved the steps. This art instructional approach can be used successfully as a group or independent study. (Author)

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THE THUMBNAIL SKETCH AND

THE BIG-TO-SMALL PRINCIPLE

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Running head: The Thumbnail Sketch

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Abstract

Adult students enrolled in day and evening drawing classes can be introduced to two-dimensional composition through an exercise that combines the thumbnail sketch and the big-to-small principle. The exercise is composed of a) five steps and b) simple self-evaluation criteria that help students determine whether they understood and achieved the steps. This art instructional approach can be used successfully as a group or independent study.

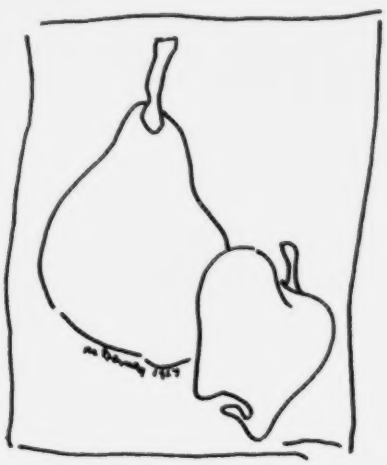
THE THUMBNAIL SKETCH AND THE BIG-TO-SMALL PRINCIPLE

The combined use of the thumbnail sketch and the big-to-small principle in an exercise is an effective way of introducing adult students enrolled in day and evening drawing classes to composition. That is, the students will be introduced to the essence of two-dimensional composition.

The thumbnail sketch originated with the English painter William Hogarth (1697-1764). Supposedly, Hogarth--wanting to draw a tavern scene and not having any paper with him--created a sketch on his thumbnail.

The thumbnail sketch is defined as any small drawing that is framed by line. See Fig. 1 below.

Fig. 1



When planning projects for murals, sculpture or layouts for advertising, some artists make frequent use of the thumbnail sketch. Through the production of countless thumbnail sketches, these artists are able to solve many problems in composition and aesthetics before executing the actual work.

Then, as a problem-solving tool, the thumbnail sketch can be used to help students understand the essence of composition--the big to small principle. For until students are able to comprehend such a seemingly simple phrase, their work will lack the other artistic principles.

Composition Exercise

Steps for Using Thumbnail Sketch and the Big-to-Small Principle

For the following exercise, the usual drawing materials will be effective. However, the bamboo pen and ink are recommended. Through the use of the bamboo pen, students will be motivated to render the essence of form, with only line.

1. Create a small sketch of one of your favorite objects (subjects).

2. As illustrated in Fig. 2, beginning with the left side of the completed sketch, draw a vertical line near the object that will show a big-to-small relationship between the object and the space on the paper.

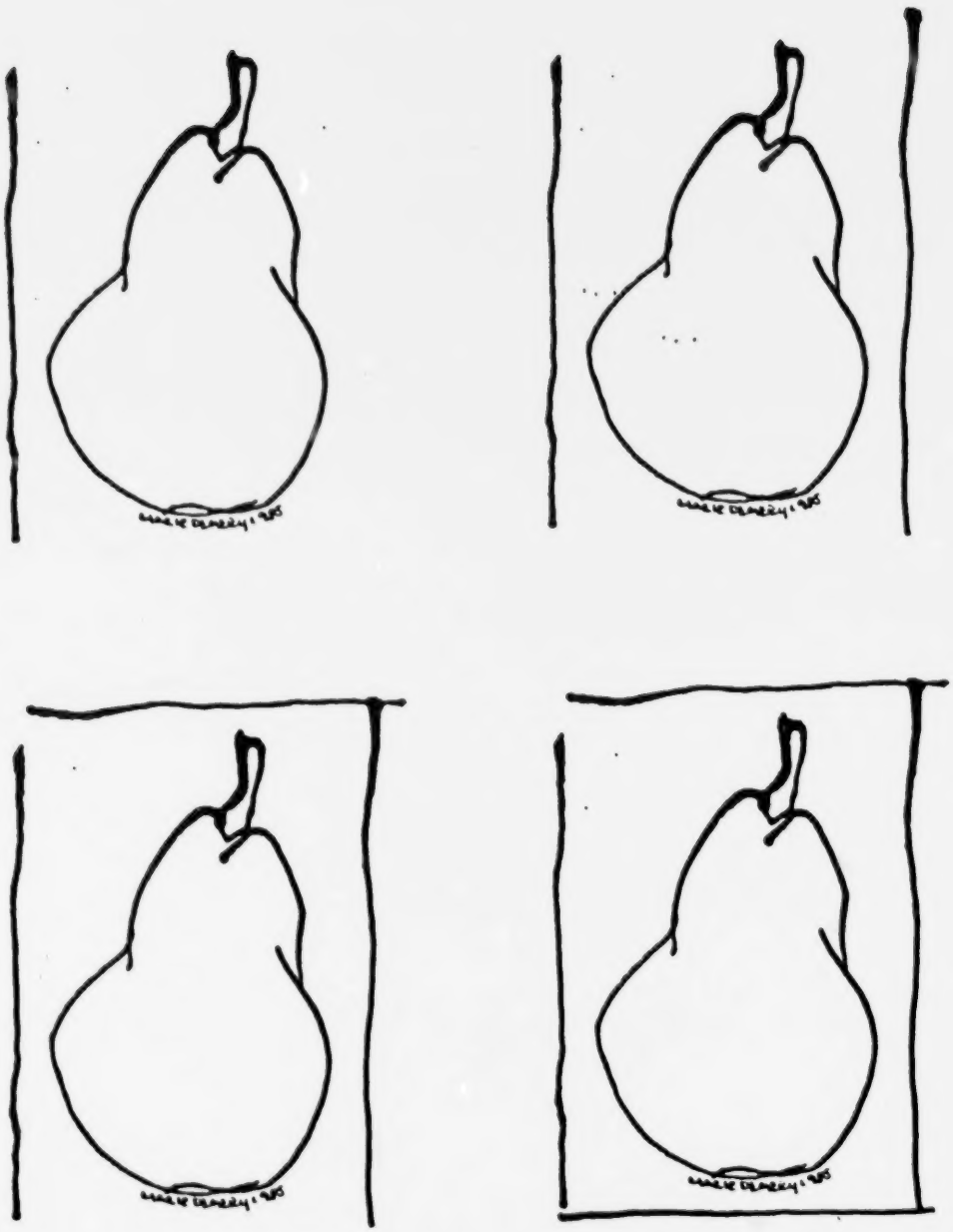
3. On the right side of the sketch, draw a vertical line near the object that will show a big-to-small relationship between the object and the space on the paper.

4. At the top of the sketch, draw a horizontal line near the object that will show a big-to-small relationship between the object and the space on the paper.

5. At the bottom of the sketch, draw a horizontal line near the object that will show a big-to-small relationship between the object and the space on the paper.

The preceding steps can be read to students in a classroom or students can read these steps on an independent basis through the use of handout copies.

Fig. 2



Self-Evaluation

Evaluation criteria for this composition exercise consist of two questions.

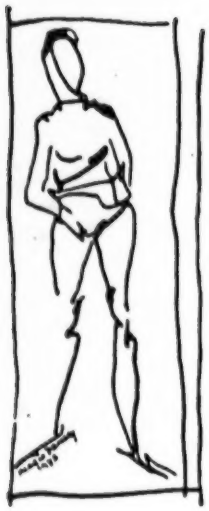
1. Does each side of the framed drawing show a big-to-small relationship between form and space?

2. Does the total framed drawing show a big-to-small relationship between subject and space?

As shown in Fig. 3, the thumbnail sketch and the big-to-small principle can also be used for studying art by the masters. In addition, such sketches can illustrate how the big-to-small relationship can be achieved through trial-and-error, i.e., a second vertical or horizontal line may produce the big-to-small relationship on one side of a drawing.

This group or independent art instructional strategy is thus effective as an introduction to the essence of two-dimensional composition. Examples of student work in Fig. 4 provide confirmation.

Fig. 3



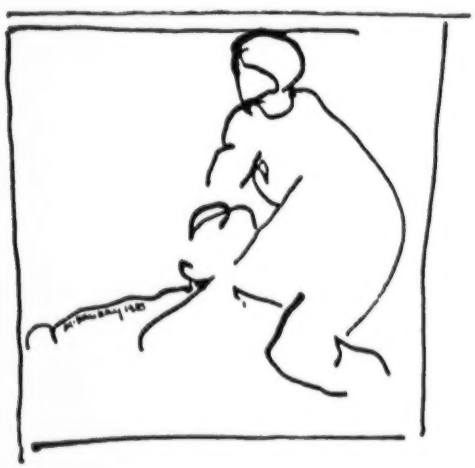
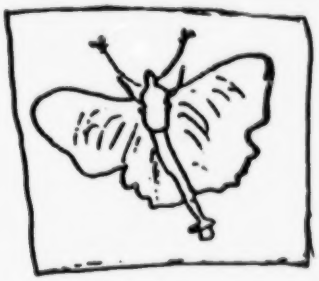
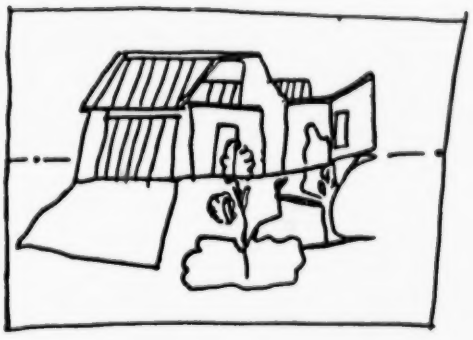


Fig. 4

From top to bottom, student thumbnail sketches are by Cletus Elegonye, Vernetta Lockridge and Blessing Ochiulo.





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